

History Short Reads

# The Silver Pharaohs

The Royal Tombs  
of Tanis



Benjamín Collado Hinarejos

**Cover:** Detail of the magnificent silver coffin located in the NRTIII tomb containing the mummy of Psusennes I. Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The image has been retouched by the author.



Decorated gold and silver cups from General Wendjebwaendjed tomb.  
Photo, John Campana

## ***About the Author***

My love for history and archeology have accompanied me since childhood, and I've been fortunate to grow up in an area rich in remains from various past cultures; something that has given me the opportunity to participate in numerous archaeological excavations in ruins of the Iberian and Roman period in Spain. I graduated in History, specializing in Ancient History and Protohistory, and so far I have published the books "The Iberians" -Spanish- (Akal, 2013), "The Iberians and their World" -Spanish- (Akal, 2014), "The Iberians and the War" -Spanish- (Amazon, 2014), "Tutankhamun Tomb and the Curse of the Mummies" -Spanish- (Amazon, 2014), "The Royal Mummies' Hideout" -English- (Amazon, 2015), "Sex and Erotism in Ancient Egypt" -Spanish- (Amazon, 2014), and the one you have in your hands/screen.

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# The Silver Pharaohs

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1. Head Hawk from the silver casket containing the remains of Pharaoh Sheshonq II, located at the royal necropolis of Tanis.

## ***Introduction***

On February 27th, 1939, while Europe looked askance at Germany, and while Hitler continued his political maneuvers and verbal escalations, a French Egyptologist, Pierre Montet, entered into what looked like a tomb plundered many centuries ago among the fertile palm groves of the Nile Delta. On the walls of the underground chamber could be seen engraved the name of Takelot II, sovereign of the XXII Dynasty. What that man had just discovered was nothing less than the lost Necropolis of the Pharaohs of Tanis.

On March 20th of that year, in the same place, Montet had an even more spectacular discovery; while German troops settled into Czechoslovakia after the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in a trial of what in a few months after would be the conquest of Poland; the Frenchman found the intact tomb of King Sheshonq II. And within a hidden chamber of that same grave, another pharaoh —Psusennes I— still awaited surrounded by immense treasures.

This poor timing between the discovery of the royal tombs of Tanis and the escalating war in Europe was the main reason why almost no one back then was aware of the important discovery, and the reason why, even today, while visitors to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo crowd the galleries that keep the treasures found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, there are few who spend more than a cursory glance at the nearest keeping room dedicated to the findings in the Tanis necropolis.

The boy-pharaoh was fortunate that his tomb was discovered in 1922, during the "Roaring 20s," a period of peace and optimism in which newspapers from half the world were stationed at the tomb of the Valley of the Kings to give a full account of everything surrounding the discovery. By contrast, Sheshonq, Psusennes and their people appeared at a time when the world was preparing for the biggest catastrophe suffered (and caused) by humans since the time of our origin; that would end the lives of 50 million souls. The thoughts and fears of the world at that point were far from Egypt, more centered on those beginning to die in Europe than those whom had

died 3,000 years ago on the banks of the Nile.

This is the story of that discovery.

## **Pierre Montet and Tanis**

Often we read that the discovery of the royal tombs of Tanis was a fluke, and this is something I think is really unfair to their discoverer, since no one can say that making a discovery after eleven years of hard work in the same field is accidental. It's true, however, that Montet was not specifically looking for these royal tombs; but the truth is that no archaeologist really knows what is going to find by digging underground, no matter what he's looking for, and that's part of the magic of archaeology.



2. Pierre Montet inspects the silver sarcophagus of Pharaoh Psusennes I shortly after its discovery.

Pierre Marie Montet was born on June 27th, 1885 in Villefranche sur-Saône, capital of the historical region of Beaujolais, famous for its wines, and his studies soon headed for Egyptology, and in 1910 he achieved his dream of going to the country of the Nile

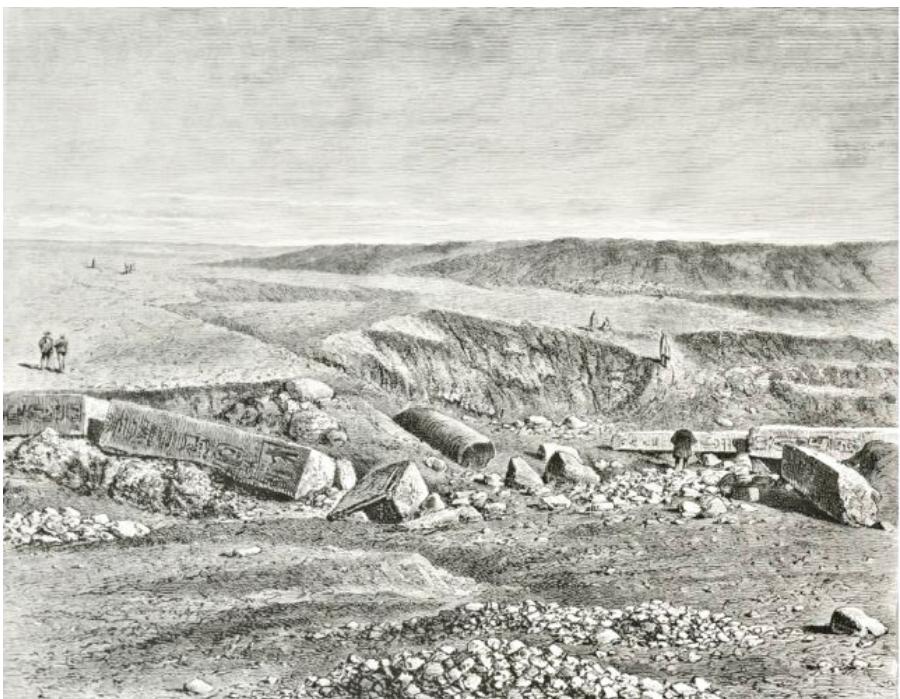
through a scholarship from the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology.

Between 1911 and 1913 he dug in various places like Kasr es-Sayad, Siout, Der Rifeh and the important necropolis of Beni-Hassan. He describes part of his job there in this way:

"I was able to compare texts, draw some scenes and details that had been collected somewhat schematically in M. Newberry's art prints and inaccurately in Champollion and Rosellini's"

Between 1913 and 1914 he excavated the necropolis of Abou Roach, where he discovered several tombs of the first dynasty. But the outbreak of World War I led him to the front, where he appeared in several battles in which he was wounded but also awarded for his service.

After the war, he devoted time to teaching at the University of Strasbourg. But the East was calling him, so in 1920 he moved to Byblos in ancient Phoenicia, and for five years directed the excavation of this port city, which in ancient times was a hub of intense trade with Pharaonic Egypt.



3. Nineteenth century engraving showing the remains found after excavations on the Tel of San-el Hagar in 1878.

In 1928 the French government commissioned him to dig in San el-Hagar and guaranteed an annual allocation. Finally, in 1929, Egypt signed a concession which allowed Montent to head to the Nile Delta. Beside San el-Hagar raised an imposing *tell*. A tell is a hill formed by overlapping structures built by men over many centuries, and by falling down and getting covered by sand coming from the nearby desert creates an elevation that gradually takes on the appearance of a natural formation. It was there that Montet expected to find evidence of ancient contacts between the Pharaonic and Semitic worlds:

"On the shores of Syria I searched and found traces of the Egyptians. Tanis seemed to me, then, the town of Egypt where there were more chances of finding traces of the Semites".

This evidence of the contacts had already been found in Byblos, but he also hoped to find evidence of an Egyptian pharaoh's attack on the Jewish capital that appears in the Old Testament:

"In the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem.—

because (*its people*) were not faithful to the Lord — with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen; And no one could tell the people that came with him from Egypt: Libyans, Cushites and Ethiopians. He took the fortified cities of Judah and arrived to Jerusalem ...

... Rose, then, Shishak king of Egypt against Jerusalem and he took away the treasures of the house of Yahweh and the treasures of the royal house. He took it all, and also took the golden shields made by Solomon. "

(1 Kings 14)

Montet identified that Shishak with Sheshonq I, Pharaoh founder of the XXII Dynasty that had reigned between 945 and 924 BC, so he tried to find in Tanis traces of the invasion of Israel and, why not? Some of the objects looted from the temple of King Solomon. Some researchers go further and say the secret goal of Montet was nothing less than to locate the Ark of the Covenant, which supposedly stored the tablets of the laws that Yahweh had given to Moses. In fact, this information was used by American filmmaker Steven Spielberg to develop the plot of his film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in which we can recall were the Nazis who digged in Tanis looking for that sacred object.

Montet didn't find the treasures of King Solomon's temple, but as we know, he found others that were equally or more spectacular than those of the biblical monarch.



4. Image of the excavations at Tanis made by Pierre Montet. Next to the statue of Ramses we can see her own daughter playing.

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In total Montet excavated in Tanis for fifteen annual campaigns between 1929 and 1951, with a break between 1941 and 1944 motivated by the Second World War. In fact the work on this exceptional site has continued to this day through new generations of excavators.

## **Tanis**

In the northeast of the Nile Delta, next to one of the many branches of the river, we find the city of San el-Hagar, and very close to it, on a sandy hill visible from a great distance, the ruins of what once was the Djanet of ancient Egyptians or the Zoan of the Bible. But like many other places in Egypt it has come to us instead with its Greek name: Tanis; the former capital of the nineteenth *nome* (province) of Lower Egypt during the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1069-664 BC), and that was favored by the kings of the dynasties XXI and XXII. The former made it their political capital at the expense of Pi-Ramses, while the latter also elected it as their religious and funerary capital.

In those years Tanis enjoyed a time of great height, because of its strategic location as a stopover en route to Asia that made it a key point in trade with the Middle East, from whence came and departed immense wealth. It began to go into decline during the XXVI Dynasty (Saites), when economic and political axes moved toward the western delta; with new hubs such as Sais or the newly founded Greek colony of Naucratis.



5. Map of the author showing the Nile Delta with some of the major ancient cities. Circled: Tanis.

However, from the 5th century AD the area of the Nile Delta began to depopulate as a result of geological and ecological changes that made life very difficult there, initiating a decline which it could not recover from. After the decline, the region became known to European researchers from the late eighteenth century, as it was briefly studied and sketched during the Napoleonic expedition of 1789. But it was not until the following century when true excavation campaigns were carried out, although at this point they were far from the modern scientific missions and were instead limited to finding a few artifacts to smuggle.

An example of this activity is the attempt by the then French Consul, Bernardino Drovetti, of unearthing in 1811 two obelisks and moving them to France to give them to Napoleon, though he had to abandon the project because of its high cost. In 1825 J.J. Rifaud recovered numerous pieces in the site and made a map to indicate to Drovetti the points where he had found some of the items he took

from Tanis. The English Egyptologist James Burton arrived to San el-Hagar in 1928, and from there he copied various inscriptions and drew a map; being perhaps the first to realize the wealth of materials from the reign of Ramses II.

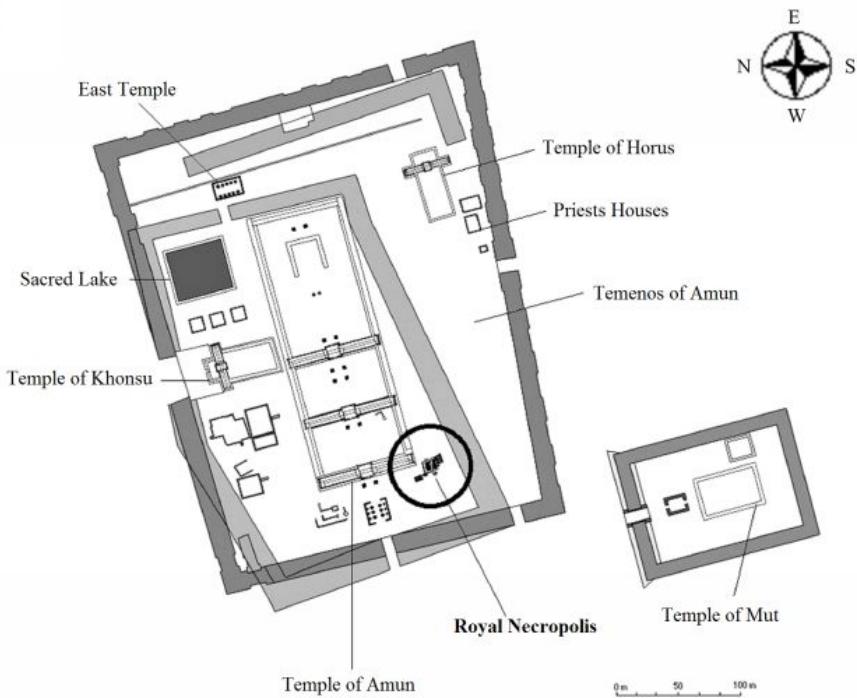
As in so many other places in Egypt, it would be Auguste Mariette who would take a turn to the investigations on the mound for San el-Hagar. He began to perform work there in a scientific way in 1860, followed by Flinders Petrie, who excavated between 1883 and 1886. However, the world would have to wait until 1929 for another Frenchman, Pierre Montet, to land in the ruins with the intention of performing comprehensive digging into that old stone puzzle. During numerous and intense campaigns he worked hard to unravel the secrets of a city he never even identified correctly; as he believed that Tanis, Avaris and Pi-Ramses were the same thing.

This confusion had persisted from ancient times, since Mariette himself, based on misidentification of various sculptures, had believed he found Avaris, the former capital of the Hyksos. Today we know that while they are nearby to each other, these are three clearly distinct cities.

To add to the confusion, these ruins had characteristics that made it very difficult to give a fair assessment and identification. For centuries, successive pharaohs had moved there numerous monuments, sculptures and other construction elements that were originally built in many different places in Egypt, some very distant. The most abundant materials had inscriptions in the name of Ramses II, which made it easy to confuse these ruins with those belonging to the capital of that Pharaoh, Pi-Ramses, which as we mentioned is relatively near to Tanis.

To complicate the situation even further, rainfall, more frequent in the delta than in the rest of Egypt blurred the stratigraphy; and if this were not enough, for centuries this vast field of ruins was used by local people as a quarry to supply the lime kilns, where the majority of the blocks used in the construction of monuments were used. Researchers estimate that more than 90% of the stones forming the great temple of Amun at Tanis disappeared to be consumed by

these furnaces.



6. Overview of Tanis' sacred area with the main temples, most notably that of Amon, with its various construction phases.

The royal necropolis appears circled.

Drawing of Neithsabes, modified by the author.

Today it seems like it was an obvious attempt by the Tanite pharaohs to incorporate the reused material to build a replica of Thebes in their capital, at least with regard to religious monuments. Thus they reproduced Karnak's temple in the northern part of the Tell (temenos of Amun and Mut), while in the south they raised the temenos of Amon of Opet in the likeness of the temple of Luxor.

An attempt to respect the Theban division is also observed: temples in the East and tombs in the West, when building the royal necropolis near the southwest corner of the Temple of Amun.

And as one would expect, in similar temples, similar gods were worshiped: the Theban triad, consisting of Amun, Mut and Khonsu was chosen as the center of Tanite worship.

Most of the archaeological missions that have worked at the site have focused their research in the area of the temples of Amun

and Mut, where Montet located the royal necropolis, as this is the area that had more visible remnants from ancient times.

The temenos (sacred enclosure) of Amun and Mut is accessed by a processional avenue that once was flanked by at least 15 obelisks, coming mostly from monuments erected by Ramses II. If we consider the foundation deposits located on site, this temple was initiated by Psusennes I though, as usual, was extended by successive pharaohs.

The worship building was surrounded by a powerful wall ring, which also had to be expanded as new buildings were added. Among these extensions we find those made by Siamun and Osorkon III, who added new pylons; and Sheshonq III, who built a monumental granite entrance.



7. One of the many statues of Ramses II found in the ruins of ancient Tanis.

Works on San-el-Hagar did not end with Montet, because since 1965 teams of French archaeologists have continued excavating Tanis until today under the responsibility of the *Société Francaise des Fouilles de Tanis*.



8. View of the royal necropolis of Tanis during the excavation process. Lack of monumentality and the extensive use of recycled materials can be seen perfectly.

### *The Royal Necropolis and its Discovery*

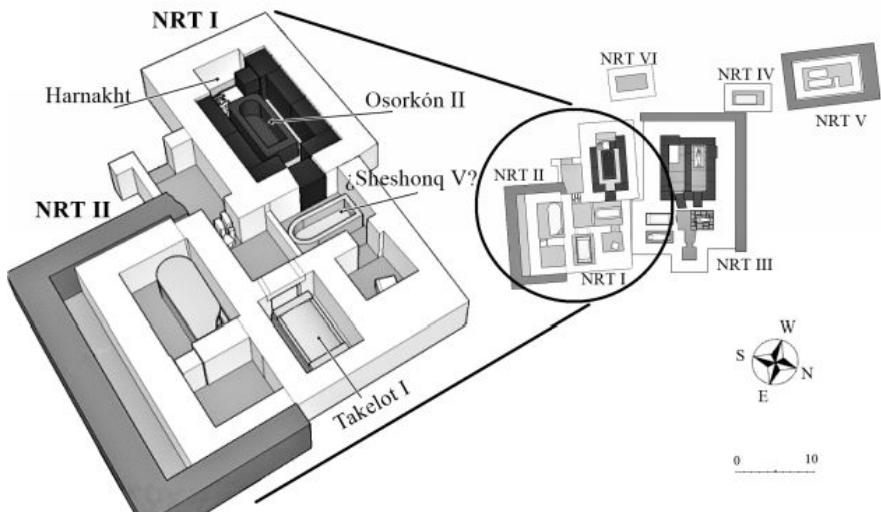
As we pointed out earlier, Montet was not looking for this cemetery, although he knew the possible existence of a royal necropolis in the delta thanks to the papyrus Anastasi VIII, which speaks of "the necropolis of Ramesses, beloved of Amun at the edge of the waters of Ra". Montet concluded (after the discovery of the graves) that the Tanite branch of the Nile matched these "Waters of Ra" mentioned in the papyrus. Shortly before the discovery he had found a gold amulet and fragments of funerary figurines in the name of King Osorkon in the area, which made him suspect the existence of a royal tomb nearby.

As usual, the fact that some of the tombs of this necropolis have come down to us intact is due to the combination of a series of fortunate circumstances, most notably the fact that, unlike other areas of Egypt as Thebes or Abydos, in this one we don't find a tradition of

royal burials or a large noble necropolis, which would also involve less individuals dedicated to their plundering. In the case of these tombs, it also greatly helped that between the Persian and Ptolemaic times there was erected above them a number of houses, shops and chapels that would have removed the upper structures of the graves. When in turn these more modern buildings were ruined, they buried the tombs underneath them, which were then forgotten.

Since early 1939, Montet's men were digging southwest of the temple of Amun as they wanted to study the reasons behind the deviations of a temple wall. In February, when digging in the mud floor of the buildings mentioned in the previous paragraph, several wells were found. In one of them debris was removed, and seven meters deep into this dig there appeared large stone blocks. They thought they would be the base of another building, but after continuing the removal of the tons of sand that covered them, they discovered that the huge slabs were not part of the ground construction, but the roofing of a tomb. The chosen one to verify the tomb's existence was a young man named George Goyon. He entered into the opening by being held upside-down by his feet. Unfortunately they found out that this hole they used as an access-point was the same one made by grave robbers who had plundered the tomb many centuries ago.

Yet the finding was superb, as they soon were able to see that they were not only before a royal burial, but that it also preserved important remains of grave goods.



9. Drawing showing a general view of the royal necropolis, with tombs NRTI and NRTII expanded. Occupants of each of the chambers are indicated. Drawing of Neithsabes, modified by the author.

## ***Osorkon II's Tomb***

The first tomb studied, known as RNT I (Royal Necropolis of Tanis 1) was made up of five rooms where they had installed a total of five sarcophagi.

In the main chamber was found a huge granite sarcophagus that held the remains of the fifth pharaoh of the XXII Dynasty—Osorkon II—who reigned from about 874 to 850 BC. For the cover of the sarcophagus they had used part of a statue of Ramesside times properly trimmed . The pharaoh had been deposited in turn in a falcon-headed silver sarcophagus, of which only fragments were found. This silver sarcophagus would be similar to other recovered later in a nearby tomb containing the remains of Pharaoh Sheshonq II.

Next to the remains of Osorkon they found fragments of a wooden sarcophagus and gold jewelry and semi precious stones.



10. Gold figurine known as the "Triad of Osorkon," for having the name of the pharaoh engraved on the pedestal on which Osiris stands, flanked by Horus and Isis. Unknown provenance.  
Louvre Museum, Paris.

The burial chamber of Osorkon is mostly covered with large granite blocks and is really small, since around the huge sarcophagus there's just a narrow corridor that leaves little room for people or grave goods; space that at the moment of the discovery was occupied by canopic vessels and more than three hundred ushebtis with the name of Osorkon.

Although Osorkon was the main occupant of the tomb, this was not the only king buried there, and it seems that other pharaohs passed through their cameras at one time or another.

And not just pharaohs, because along with Osorkon was buried Harnakht, his son, who despite having only been eight or nine at the time of his death, was first priest of Amun at Tanis. In this case the child died before the father and preceded him in the grave. To accommodate the sarcophagus of the prince (which was also reused)

the tomb was enlarged by removing some granite blocks of the west wall. Inside the sarcophagus, along the remains of Harnakht were found some of the jewels he was buried with and part of the silver casket in which rested the deceased and that the thieves could not get entirely through the hole they made in the stone sarcophagus.

In another chamber of the same tomb, which had previously been redecorated, appeared the looted burial of Pharaoh Takelot I, successor of Osorkon, for which a Middle Kingdom sarcophagus was reused. One last chamber contained the remains of what may have been a secondary burial of King Sheshonq III. The possibility that Osorkon I and Sheshonq V could have passed through this tomb is not ruled out, as there appeared some objects and evidence of their presence. If it is confirmed then this would be what Egyptologists would call a *cachette*; a burial in which several bodies from other graves are gathered—moved there for different reasons.

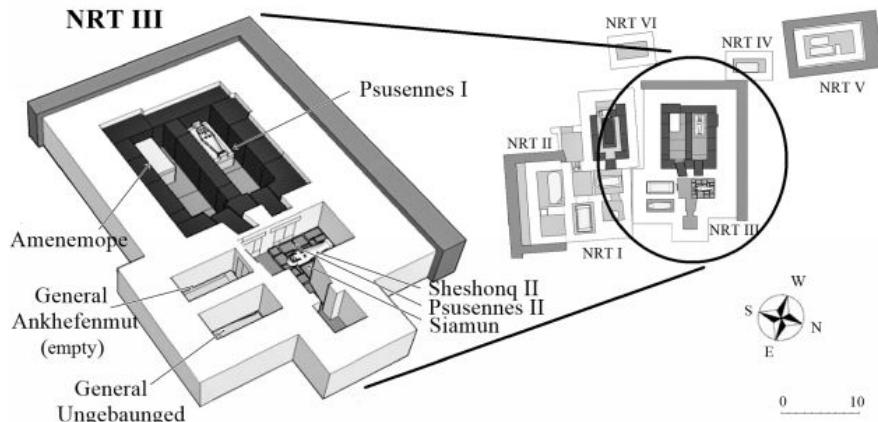
This tomb put on the table several issues that puzzled researchers for a long time. One such issue was the paradox that while it appeared that the tomb of Osorkon had been built before that of Psusennes (NRT-III), since the latter had to adapt to the space left by the previous one; the occupants of NRT-III belonged to the XXI dynasty, i.e., they reigned before the pharaohs resting at NRT-I, which belonged to the subsequent XXII dynasty. This led to some archaeologists to defend a change in the royal lists to accommodate the new chronological order that these tombs seemed to indicate.

Eventually, however, everything seemed to suggest that the solution to this puzzle was much simpler: they had simply discovered a reoccupation of old graves by new tenants, something that matches marvelously with the spirit of Tanis, the Egyptian capital of recycling and reuse. Let's not forget that all the stones used for the construction of the tombs are from earlier monuments, mostly from Ramesside times. Moreover, it seems that this tomb was originally built for Pharaoh Smendes (1069-1043 BC), but Osorkon II occupied it after adapting it to his needs by adding new decor, introducing a new sarcophagus for himself and knocking down part of the west wall of his own chamber to make room inside for his son. It also amended the

lobby of the tomb, where he settled another sarcophagus for his father.

But despite being a discovery of such a magnitude, the best was yet to come, and it was on March 17th, 1939 that they had to stop work on the tomb of Osorkon II, as an even more spectacular discovery had taken place a few meters from the previous one.

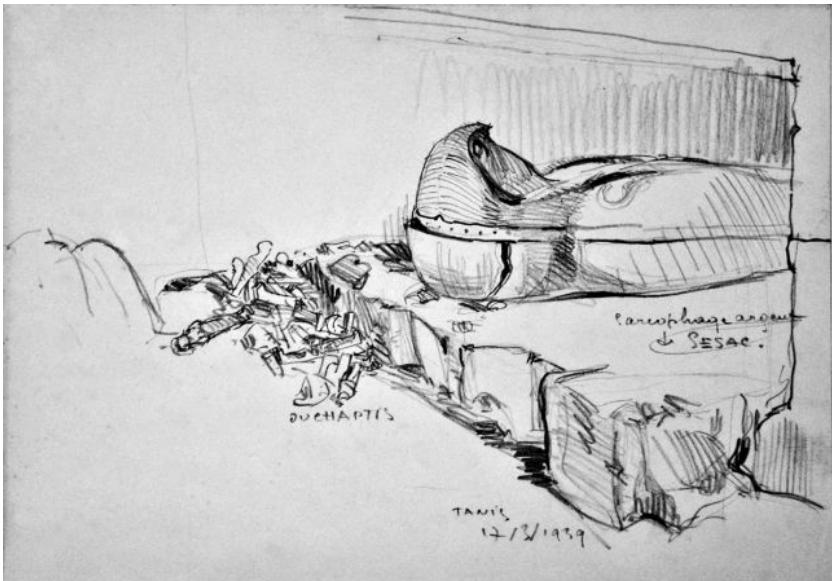
Archaeologists had lifted a thick slab of rock that revealed another burial chamber. When penetrating through the hole they reached a kind of well, and behind a wall a small corridor opened, and on the other side they could see what no archaeologist had seen before: the first fully intact royal tomb of Egypt, since we must remember that even the famous tomb of Tutankhamun, despite the fantastic treasures it contained, had suffered at least two intrusions.



11. Drawing showing a general view of the royal necropolis with the NRTIII tomb extended. Occupants of each of the chambers are indicated. Drawing of Neithsabes, modified by the author.

### ***The Tomb of Psusennes I***

"Our eyes were accustomed gradually, now we could see the dark depths of a room. [...] What we saw then filled us with admiration ... The dream! The legendary dream of every archaeologist [...] to see open before him the true cave of Ali Baba. The dream had come true! [...] Before us, on the floor, we vaguely distinguished lots of mixed objects of which emerged the glittering of gold. A series of stone and alabaster vessels, including canopic jars still standing against the wall. On the right, a black shape with purple reflections laid on a stone platform. A statue? It looked more like a mummy container, yes, a sort of anthropomorphic sarcophagus, but topped with the head of a bird, a so unusual tomb that nothing like it was known in the archaeological records. A crack in the side of the casket let out reflections from polished, shiny gold, unaltered, as new [...] ". (Goyon (G.) The discovery of the treasures of Tanis, Paris, 2004).



12. Sketch showing the location of the silver coffin of Pharaoh Sheshonq II and ushebtis that were piled beside it, just as their discoverers found it. The date 17-03-1939 can be seen perfectly. Drawing of Pierre Montet.

As Montet's assistant George Goyon tells us, the first thing they saw was a strange sarcophagus with a falcon head covered with dust and debris, resting on stone blocks. They soon discovered that it was made entirely of silver. On both sides of the sarcophagus there were two skeletons, but only some gold leaves of the external decoration remained from the wooden sarcophagus that had contained them, and those leaves adorned now, in a macabre way, the bones of the two men, who also retained some jewelry. Researchers believe that these two bodies are those of pharaohs Siamun and Psusennes II.

Alongside the skeletons were multiple pieces of funerary equipment, including canopic vessels and a small mountain formed by hundreds of "ushebtis"; figurines of servants that would have to do the work of the deceased in the afterlife.

On the walls of the burial chamber one could read a name: Psusennes I, but something didn't quite add up.

"That's when the inscription carved on the central band of the sarcophagus appeared, with cartridges containing the royal protocol I had the pleasure of deciphering first" Héqakheperrê Chéchang beloved of Amun," I read aloud. Montet got angry: "You must have misread, we know of no king of this name," he said." (Goyon (G.) the discovery

The name on the sarcophagus belonged to an unknown pharaoh different to the tomb's owner.

Given the magnitude of the discovery it was immediately decided to close the tomb until a proper security system could be established, for which the next day several soldiers and an officer were sent from Cairo to install it.

The discovery was of such a level that king Farouk himself decided to attend the March 21<sup>st</sup> opening of the silver sarcophagus and the organizing of the tomb's inventory.

"The next day, in the presence of King Farouk [...] Together we lifted the lid of the silver sarcophagus. That's when it appeared in all its beauty, set by the magic of incorruptible metal, the gold mask, the radiant image of Pharaoh Héqakheperré-Chéchanq [...] This beautiful mask, whipped into a plate of pure gold of a millimeter thick, was not only a wonderful piece of jewelry, but also a historical document of the first order [...] "(Goyon (G.) the discovery of the treasures of Tanis, Paris, 2004)

The royal mummy was inside a golden *cartonnage* with face covered by a mask in the shape of falcon's head made of gold foil. All the organic parts were in very bad condition, so they had to be consolidated, work done by Alfred Lucas, the same man who worked on the tomb of Tutankhamun. What it had kept in perfect condition were the large number of jewelries such as the king's necklaces, pectorals, earrings, bracelets and rings. As was customary, the fingers and toes were covered with gold caps and wore sandals, also of gold.

Once consolidated, the contents of the chamber were transferred to the Cairo Museum, so the next step could start: the opening of the burial chambers that where on the back of the lobby and that were closed by two granite blocks.

The northernmost section, with its access blocked by a section of an obelisk of Rameses II, proved to be the one containing the body of Psusennes I, the original owner of the tomb, resting in a pink granite sarcophagus located at the bottom of the compartment surrounded by a huge number of artifacts he was buried with. Unfortunately the weather, which was much more humid than that of the Valley of the Kings, had done away with most of objects made of

perishable materials, depriving us of valuable information.



13. The two magnificent silver coffins located in the NRTIII tomb: the one above, falcon-headed, contained the mummy of Sheshonq II, while the bottom one kept the remains of Psusennes I. Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The sarcophagus was reused and had belonged to Merenptah, pharaoh of the nineteenth dynasty and successor of the great Ramses II, and on it there was still preserved a scepter made of gold and wood deposited at the time of burial.

Inside, there was a second anthropoid sarcophagus of black granite also reused, although we don't know its original owner. This second sarcophagus still kept another also anthropomorphic one, but this completely made of silver, showing the king's face covered with the *Nemes* and a solid gold uraeus on its forehead.

When opening it they found a gold mask covering the king's head extending to the chest. This mask was reminiscent of that of Tutankhamun, although the boy Pharaoh's had lots of inlaid carnelian, glass paste, turquoise, etc., which gave it a very colorful appearance, while that of Psusennes only used lapis lazuli for highlighting the beard, eyebrows and eyes, while the rest shows only the color of gold, which has a dull sheen, as it wasn't polished.

The pharaoh's mummy was covered up to a foot by a gold foil

embossed with decorative motifs similar to those of the silver sarcophagus. And another silver foil separated the body of the king from the bottom of the sarcophagus.



14. Extraordinary gold mask that covered the head and chest of Pharaoh Psusennes I. Reminds of Tutankhamun's. Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The jewels adorning the mummy are magnificent, and among them are six gold necklaces, one of which has a cuneiform inscription; it was the gift of a grand vizier of Syria to one of his daughters, which was probably sent to Psusennes' harem.

The ornamentation was completed with pectorals of gold and precious stones, twenty bracelets adorning her arms and legs, rings and earrings, as well as the traditional gold plate covering the cut made on the left side through which the Pharaoh's guts had been removed during mummification.

Before the sarcophagus were deposited cups, bowls and plates of gold and silver, many ushebtis, scepters and weapons, of which only some metal parts remained: including arrowheads, shield umbones, sword handles, etc.

It is a truly exceptional collection that we enjoy today in the Cairo Museum.





15. Golden mask that covered the head and part of the chest of Pharaoh Amenemope. It can be seen how the artistic quality is far from that of the masks of Tutankhamun and Psusennes. Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

## *Amenemope's Tomb*

As soon as works were completed in Psusennes' chamber, archaeologists set out to open the chamber next to it, so they had to expand that year's campaign. They didn't want to leave an intact tomb waiting for months. It was just too tempting for thieves, a risk they couldn't take.

The decoration on the wall that blocked the door showed Psusennes' mother: Queen Mutnegemet, but her name had been replaced by that of King Amenemope, Psusennes's successor. The granite sarcophagus had also suffered the same change in the name of its occupant and in this case it had only contained a single gilded wooden sarcophagus, of which there were only a few remnants around the king's body.

On the head and hands of the mummy there had been placed a thick gold foil and a mask, also of gold, covering the head and chest. A significant number of jewelry were visible on the pharaoh's body, although less than in the case of Psusennes. Alongside the sarcophagus was the rest of the outfit that consisted of: the ushebtis, tableware of silver and bronze and four alabaster canopic jars without lids.

We don't know the reason for the presence of this pharaoh in the tomb of Psusennes' mother, since Amenemope had his own grave in the same cemetery; a simple limestone chamber plundered since ancient times in which only a few funerary figurines were found alongside the sarcophagus itself, with the pink granite top reused from another much older one, perhaps even of the Fourth Dynasty. It is possible that the body of the pharaoh was moved to its final location in an attempt to prevent its desecration, although it was only moved by around a dozen meters, so that the security conditions vary very little. This is one of the mysteries that still surrounds this finding.

Remember that while these archaeological works were underway, more and more countries were involved in WWII and they grew daily in virulence, so that after the transfer of all the pieces to Cairo, the excavation was closed, and would not be resumed until 1945.

Though a guard was in charge of monitoring the tombs, thieves acted again, stirring Psusennes' tomb and looking for some leftover valuables to pillage. Most damaging was the 1943 theft of Psusennes' jewels, which were kept in a safe in the basement of the Cairo Museum. Although almost all the stolen pieces were recovered, some pieces were lost forever.



16. Gold mask of general Wendjebwaendjed, whose burial chamber was the last to be located in the tomb of Psusennes. Its rich trousseau was worthy of a king. Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

## *The Last Secrets of Psusennes' Tomb*

On April 15, 1945, when the war was in its last throes, Montet went back to Tanis, though only accompanied by his daughter and George Goyon. His idea was to continue exploring Psusennes' tomb, as he was sure he hadn't yet discovered all its secrets. In the southern wall of the antechamber he found an opening to another burial chamber that was ready to receive general Ankhefenmut in a granite sarcophagus also reused. On the walls of the tomb appeared his name followed by his many titles, "Grand Steward of Amun, Great Commander of the Horses of Amun, First Great Squire of His Majesty, Prophet of Mut, Lady of Isheru." The accumulation of so many honors, the fact that he shared the royal burial, and some inscriptions that were found, would suggest that he was a prince, a son of Psusennes himself. But the sarcophagus appeared empty, and there was not a single piece of the grave goods inside the chamber.

In the following year, yet another tomb was discovered (next to the previous one), when Montet no longer directed the excavation. Alexandre Lezine found the burial chamber of the General Wendjebwaendjed decorated with brightly painted reliefs that quickly faded as soon as the tomb was opened and the atmosphere, which had remained unchanged for nearly 3000 years, was modified.

Wendjebwaendjed also rested in a second-hand sarcophagus, which in this case had belonged to a priest of Amun at Thebes, though it seemed that its new owner didn't like the original decoration, since they covered it with stucco and made a new one, to which they then added a golden finish.

Within the granite sarcophagus appeared some remains of another one of timber in which Wendjebwaendjed had been buried, in turn inside a silver sarcophagus of which they were only able to recover some badly damaged fragments. What was kept in perfect condition was the golden mask covering the General's face, the gold covers of fingers and toes, and amulets and jewels adorning its body, which included three breastplates, two bracelets and several rings, all made of gold. The funerary equipment was completed with crockery

of gold and silver, various weapons and, of course, its canopic jars, made of alabaster and with lids in the form of human heads.

Unfortunately we have no photographs showing the work inside the tombs or of the artifacts and parts in their original positions in the style of the extraordinary images that Harry Burton took in Tutankhamun's tomb. Perhaps the background of the war prompted the team to hastily remove all material from the burial chambers faster than advisable. Likewise the meticulous work of scale drawing all the material before moving it, which was done in Tut's tomb, was put aside in this case.

Therefore we have to settle almost exclusively with the written descriptions of Montet and Goyon.

## ***Who were these Pharaohs?***

### **The Third Intermediate Period and the Dynasties XXI and XXII**

As mentioned above, the pharaohs buried in Tanis belonged to the dynasties XXI and XXII, which in turn are framed in the so-called Third Intermediate Period, a time of instability and fragmentation of power.

Throughout the twentieth dynasty, the power of the pharaohs had been weakened in an important way. On the one hand the pharaohs gave more and more territory to the temples, especially that of Amun in Thebes, and a time came when the first priests of this temple rivaled in power with the kings. On the other hand, there emerged new, excessively powerful political groups that undermined the royal authority. One of these groups was the Libyans, who had originally come as prisoners of war and were settled in previous centuries in military colonies; but over time they became fully fledged Egyptians, without losing their identities, and their influence grew continuously until they started bringing some of their people to the throne.

The situation erupted during the reign of Ramses II, last king of the XX Dynasty, when power was divided into two fractions: The first was Upper Egypt under the command of the first priest of Amun at Thebes, who controlled the valley of the Nile. Its first ruler was Herior, who used royal titles, and who would be succeeded by his son Piankh. From this, the Theban priests would recognize the Tanite pharaohs and even some would eventually marry women from the royal family, but would govern the south completely independently.

Meanwhile in Lower Egypt, at the death of Ramses XI, Smendes rose to the throne and started the XXI Dynasty, known as Tanite after transferring their capital to Tanis, in the Delta, and in which the Libyan component was very important. The other pharaohs of this dynasty would be Amenemnisu, Psusennes I, Amenemope, Osokhor, Siamon and Psusennes II.

Sheshonq I, who was married to a daughter of Psusennes II,

started the XXII Dynasty with kings of Libyan origin. His successor was Osorkon I, accompanied at the end of his reign as regent for Seshonq II, who died without ever governing alone. Other pharaohs of this dynasty were Takelot I, Osorkon II, Takelot II and his son Osorkon III, First Priest of Amun at Thebes, who also assumed the kingship by force of arms and with which the XXII dynasty would end after continuous power struggles and a deep internal division.



17. Gold plate that was sewn between the bandages of the mummy of Pharaoh Psusennes I, just above the incision through which the viscera were removed during the mummification process.

Its function was the magical protection of the deceased.  
Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

## **Tanis Burials**

**Psusennes I.**- Was the third Pharaoh of the XXI Dynasty, and seems to have had a long and successful reign, although the exact duration is far from clear (c. 1036/989 BC). He had a brief co-regency with his predecessor Amenemnisu, and improved relations with the priests of Thebes marrying one of his daughters with the first priest of Amun in that city. He emerged as the chief priest of Amun at Tanis.

**Amenemope.**- He was the son of Psusennes I, with whom he shared power for a couple of years as co-regent. The length of his reign is unclear, although Manetho ascribes him only nine years, from 993 to 984 BC, a priest mummy in Thebes dates from the year 49 of the reign of the pharaoh. Few monuments of Amenemope are known, one of them is his own grave in the royal necropolis of Tanis from which, as stated above, was moved at an undetermined time, perhaps during the reign of Siamun, and taken to the grave of his father, where he was deposited in his mother's sarcophagus, Queen Mutnegemet. Studies on his mummy have concluded that he was lame and could have died of meningitis at around the age of 50.

**Siamun.**- One of the most powerful kings of the XXI Dynasty, apparently reigned 19 years, between 986 and 967 BC. We know little of his family, but it has left signs of a major construction activity in the temples, especially in that of Ammon in Tanis, but also in Memphis.

During his reign the first priest of Amun at Thebes, Pinedjem II organized the transfer of the royal mummies located in Deir el Bahari's *Cachette* to save them from looting that had spread through the Valley of the Kings.

**Psusennes II.**- Last pharaoh of the XXI Dynasty, reigned between approximately 959 and 945 BC. Also little is known of him, and we have learned about only a few monuments of his reign.

It seems he had been first priest of Amun at Thebes, afterwards reaching the royal dignity upon the death of Pharaoh Siamun, becoming King of Upper and Lower Egypt, reunified again, at least nominally, since the effective control of the different regions was held

more by powerful local families.

**Sheshonq II.**- There are many questions surrounding this pharaoh, who was unknown until his body was found in the antechamber of the tomb of Psusennes I. It seems he was the son of Osorkon I, which would have associated him with the throne around the year 890 BC, although it seems that the child died before the father, for which he would not have come to reign alone.

**Osorkon II.**- He reigned from 874 to 850 BC He placed his kids in key religious positions, one of them, Harnakht, was the first priest of Amun at Tanis; when he died while still a child was buried in the same chamber that Osorkon had prepared for himself.

This king undertook a major construction activity, primarily in Bubastis, but also at Thebes, Memphis and Tanis, where he used mainly building materials reused from Pi-Ramesses.

**Takelot II.**- He reigned from 860 to 835 BC, during a period of great instability, among other things because he named his son Osorkon as the first priest of Amun at Thebes, which was not accepted there, thus erupting a civil war.

**Wendjebwaendjed.**- Very important character in the court of Psusennes I that lived around 1000 BC. He had many different titles, both military and civilian, including "the King's treasurer, solely responsible for the praises of the great organized ceremonies to reward courage, the Keeper of the Seal of the King of Lower Egypt, Chief of the Navy, First Bowman of the Pharaoh, Mayor of Khonsu in Thebes, etc."



18. Sarcophagus located in the same chamber that housed the remains of Osorkon II, and containing the remains of his son Harnakht. Tanis.

## **Conclusion**

It is often said that the key of success is to be in the right place at the right time; this is evident in the history of the discovery of the royal tombs of Tanis, one of the biggest success stories of archaeology of all time, but is unknown by most of the public because it came at the worst possible moment, just when the world faced in astonishment the beginning of one of the largest military confrontations known so far to humanity.

Too often it's emphasized that this finding included the only three royal tombs found intact so far, as a reminder that Tutankhamun's tomb was not intact, but had suffered at least two intrusions in ancient times. But we must be aware that despite the thefts, the riches of the tomb of the Child King far outweigh the treasures of the Tanite necropolis. This is so for two main reasons: first, due to the fact that the exceptional preservation of objects from Tut's tomb allowed us to enjoy elements made of perishable materials, some of them as fragile as ostrich feather fans that were found in some boxes. This didn't happen in the tombs of Tanis, where the humid environment of the delta destroyed coffins, mummies and many objects made of nonmetallic materials. The other reason is political, because the weakness of the kings of the Third Intermediate Period didn't allow the accumulation of wealth that we see in the past. Even their graves are more than modest, and manufactured based on elements reused from other buildings.

Despite the silver coffins and gold masks these tombs are a true reflection of a moment of decline of kings unable to re-unify the country under a single ruler as their predecessors had done, and not only that, but with them; the end of Egyptian culture would begin, because from that moment all the pharaohs would be foreign. No Egyptian would again occupy the throne of the unified Upper and Lower Egypt. Libyans, Nubians, Persians, Greeks and Romans would eventually rise to power in the country of the Nile, on a downward path that would lead inexorably to the demise of this ancient culture.

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